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SUBJECT: TIP ON THE COAST OF CAMBODIA

1. (SBU) Summary. PolOff traveled to Cambodia's coastal regions to meet with anti-trafficking NGOs and government officials to assess the human trafficking problem and the efforts being made to combat TIP. NGOs in the port city of Sihanoukville report good cooperation with the government and a decrease in human trafficking following sustained efforts to combat the problem. NGOs in remote Koh Kong report that while cooperation with most government departments is good, the provincial anti-trafficking unit remains problematic and uncooperative. End Summary.

Sihanoukville

2. (SBU) During meetings with PolOff, NGOs Adhoc, LICADHO, and AFESIP explained that human trafficking has decreased in the province over the past two years, primarily because of government efforts to combat human trafficking. These NGOs explained many brothels have closed following police raids and that recent convictions of human traffickers have been effective deterrents. LICADHO explained that the police have been very responsive to complaints, but expressed concern that the police were negotiating out of court settlements between the victims and the perpetrators, thereby circumventing the judiciary. NGOs report dissatisfaction with the judiciary, asserting that prosecution efforts have been lax and prosecutors and judges unresponsive.

3. (SBU) AFESIP reported that there approximately 45 commercial sex establishments employing about 275 direct and 450 indirect sex workers. AFESIP explained that it has access to all sex establishments and does not believe that many of the workers are victims of trafficking. However, AFESIP did express concern about one high-end karaoke club that caters to wealthy Cambodian clientele. AFESIP reported that although it has access to the workers of this club, it is possible that trafficking victims are hidden from view. PolOff conducted informal observation of the two primary brothel districts in Sihanoukville, Blue Mountain and the New Village, and did not observe any obvious underage girls; however, it is impossible to determine whether any had been forced, deceived or were in a situation of debt bondage. While there were a couple of Western customers, the majority appeared to be local Khmers and sailors from the nearby port.

4. (U) The anti-trafficking department informed PolOff that there has been a significant decrease in the number of commercial sex establishments in the last two years because of increased police raids and government attention given to the problem of human trafficking. The anti-trafficking police received two training courses in 2005, which has helped them to improve their investigations, victim interviews, and case management. However, the department's

chief explained that while his department is trying to take increased action, it does not have sufficient resources to conduct the investigations and must resort to using personal vehicles and gas for investigations.

15. (U) Sihanoukville Governor Say Hak reported that combating human trafficking is a top priority for the government. He explained that while the government is trying to attract increased tourism with the regional airport -- which is to be operational before the end of the year -- it is concerned that Sihanoukville could become a destination for sex tourism. Hak explained that he has created a provincial plan, comprised of various departments and police, to prevent trafficking from increasing. He explained that the Department of Women's Affairs has been active on the prevention front, conducting information campaigns throughout the province.

Koh Kong

16. (U) The remote province of Koh Kong is quickly opening to the rest of Cambodia. Governor Yuth Phouthang informed PolOff that the Thai government offered low-interest loans for road construction and grants for bridges to span the four rivers that are currently crossed via ferry and are to be finished by the end of 2006 and 2007, respectively. Phouthang explained that the government has prioritized combating human trafficking, in addition to illegal logging, fishing, and land grabbing. The Governor stated that following receipt of a strict order from the central government to increase cooperation with NGOs and various government ministries on combating TIP, he established a committee to prevent human trafficking and domestic violence.

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The committee is comprised of all government departments and relevant NGOs in order to collect and coordinate information related to TIP and ensure that timely interventions are conducted. The Department of Social Affairs (DoSVY) explained that the government met with its Thai counterparts to discuss anti-TIP strategies and is cooperating on establishing a transit center for deported immigrants and trafficking victims in the province.

17. SBU) Anti-trafficking NGOs reported that cooperation with DoSVY and Women's Affairs is good; however, cooperation with the anti-trafficking unit continues to be problematic. NGOs complained that the police are reluctant to take action and often demand financial assistance to enlist their cooperation. DoSVY explained that the anti-trafficking police do not conduct proactive investigations and have even ignored complaints submitted by NGOs. However, DoSVY noted that this unwillingness could be explained by financial and technical constraints on part of the police, as they are badly resourced and ill equipped. NGOs reported that the Phnom Penh anti-trafficking unit recently conducted operations in the province, resulting in successful raids and rescues. (Note: These raids were conducted in collaboration with and support by NGO International Justice Mission). NGOs welcomed this outside action, as they have had to provide transportation and food to the provincial anti-trafficking unit in order to secure action from the police.

18. (U) The anti-trafficking unit explained to PolOff that they had cooperated with the Phnom Penh unit in three recent successful raids. The chief explained that the provincial unit had just been created in 2005 and that it has received very little training and even less funding. He explained that his unit was not even equipped with a camera and was required to hire a professional photographer in order to document arrested traffickers.

19. (SBU) AFESIP reported that there are 12-14 brothels in Koh Kong and approximately 95 sex workers. PolOff conducted informal interviews with sex workers and observation of the

various commercial sex establishments located in the area known as the Chicken Farm. It is very difficult to ascertain the ages of the sex workers, but most appeared to be over eighteen and all claimed to be voluntary adults. The workers explained that the majority of their customers are local Cambodians, with some Thai workers engaged in construction on the new road, and an occasional foreigner. The women explained that they have never met customers from or traveled to the casinos along the border area. There were no reports of commercial sex establishments located near the casinos on the border area, contradicting rumors that the Thais are traveling to Cambodia for gambling and girls.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) Although NGOs report very good cooperation with the anti-trafficking police in the principal provinces, cooperation in the remote regions like Koh Kong continues to be problematic. While the central government's expression of political will to combat human trafficking has reached the provinces, the financial resources necessary to carry out the fight have not been as forthcoming. End Comment.

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